DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 793 EA 022 322

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TITLE The Effects of Cooperative Learning in a Staff Development Program for School Administrators.
PUB DATE Jul 90
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education (Baltimore, MD, July 5-11, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Effectiveness; Administrators; *Collegiality; *Cooperative Learning; Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; Intergroup Relations; *Management Development; Organizational Climate; Peer Relationship; Peer Teaching; Professional Continuing Education; *Professional Education; Professional Training; *School Administration; Self Directed Groups; *Staff Development; Team Training
IDENTIFIERS *Maryland

ABSTRACT

The relationship between cooperative learning in staff development programs and the practice of collegial interaction is examined. Thirteen administrators and supervisors from one school district participated in a staff development program that stressed a cooperative learning method. Methodology involved a comparison of participant and control group reports, participant observation, and interviews. Findings indicate that participation in the training program contributed to differences in scores between the participants and the control group. A significant program outcome was the independent formation of cooperative learning groups. Implications of the study are that collegiality improves educational leaders' skills in dealing with supervisors, peers, and staff and that staff developers must serve as models for the success of staff development programs. Six pointers for planning staff development programs based on cooperative learning are listed. (9 references) (LMI)

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ED324793

The Effects of Cooperative Learning in a Staff Development Program for School Administrators

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presented to:
International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education, Baltimore, Maryland, July 7, 1990

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The Effects of Cooperative Learning in a Staff Development Program for School Administrators

Currently, great emphasis is being placed upon staff development and continuing education programs which foster the professional growth of educators, both teachers and school administrators. Often these programs encourage educators to join together as colleagues to improve their instructional techniques and to enrich their understanding of the teaching and learning processes. An underlying assumption of such programs is a belief that professional development will lead to the improvement of the educational program and the culture of the school (Whitford, 1989b; Joyce, 1990).

If these staff development programs are to be successful, the method used in conducting them (that is, the process used) requires as much consideration as the content of the program (that is, the product). Ideally, a staff development program should demonstrate and serve as a model of its own intended outcomes (Whitford & Hyman, 1990). It is said that experience is the best teacher and that most practice is guided by experience. If this is true, and I believe it to be so, then staff developers need to consider the models which they provide through their methods of training (Whitford, 1990; Strong, Silver, Hanson, Marzano, Wolfe, Dewing, & Brock, 1990).

One contradiction in current staff development programs lies in the contrast between the content of the programs and the method of conducting the program. For example, although collegiality is often stressed verbally as an essential component for professional growth, techniques which model or demonstrate collegiality are seldom utilized in staff development programs. Typically, programs are conducted by "experts" who present information regarding effective instructional techniques to a group of educators through a lecture-type format. Seldom is the value of collegiality instilled by the modeling of collegiality. Seldom do participants in these staff development workshops learn through their own experience that professional growth can result from a cooperative partnership. The current, common staff development method generally fails to take advantage of the opportunity to develop the sense of learning as a cooperative endeavor. In short, unfortunately the message of many staff developers appears to be the old saying, "Don't do as I do; do as I say" (Whitford, 1989).

Current research suggests that cooperation among adults will promote positive interpersonal relationships, encourage social support, foster improved self-esteem, and promote achievement (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). In lights of the research and theory

which supports the relationship between professional growth and collegial interaction, it seems appropriate to consider whether cooperative learning in staff development can and will encourage increased collegial interaction.

It was this issue regarding the relationship between cooperative learning in staff development and the practice of collegiality which guided a research study involving a staff development program for administrators. Thirteen administrators and supervisors from one school district participated in a staff development program designed to help them improve their skills in the writing of supervisory reports. In a three-day training program these educators had the opportunity to learn and practice skills necessary to write effective observation reports. The training method (the process) used for this staff development program involved cooperative learning (Whitford, 1989a).

The content of this program was largely based upon Hyman's recommendations for the skills necessary for the writing of effective supervisory reports as set forth in School Administrator's Faculty Supervision Handbook (1986). Through the method of cooperative learning, the participants worked together in pairs or trios. Together they decided what observational data they would collect as they viewed videotaped classroom lessons. They observed lessons together and then collaborated on the writing of supervisory reports. Frequently, the administrators role-played in simulated pre-observation and post-observation conferences to help clarify the focus for the written reports. Collaborative writing of the supervisory reports and the sharing of feedback on the reports occupied much of the time during the training sessions. Collaborative writing followed a writing process which encouraged the administrators to discuss, plan, write, revise, and proofread together. Collaborative feedback was guided by reading, reacting and discussing the reports written by other pairs and trios.

Because this staff development program used a cooperative learning method, the participants were the major source of assistance, support, and reinforcement for each other. The conductor of the program served as a facilitator of the activities and also participated in the small group activities. The conductor was not merely a presenter of facts and explanations. In this way cooperation among colleagues was not a "hidden" part of the program. Rather, it was clearly identified and encouraged, and its usefulness was discussed.

The outcomes of this staff development program were assessed through both experimental and ethnographic methods. With written permission from each participant in the training group, as well as from members of a control group, the school district released each administrator's last two observation reports written during May of 1987 and the first two observation reports written during

September of 1987. These were the actual classroom observation reports which all administrators in the district are required to write in the performance of their jobs. These supervisory reports were assessed by two holistic scoring procedures: general impression marking scoring and analytic scale holistic evaluation. Two raters trained in holistic evaluation scored the reports. The scores on these reports were used as the data for the statistical analysis of outcomes of the program.

The principal method used to analyze the experimental data was analysis of covariance. The independent variable was group membership. That is, members of the experimental group participated in the staff development group; members of the control group did not participate. The dependent variables were the post-test scores on the observation reports written in September. The scores on the observation reports written in May were used as the covariate. An F test using the adjusted post-test scores was used to determine whether significant differences existed between the two groups. The holistic scores for the observation reports written by the group which received training were significantly higher in general impression marking scores ($F=10.30$, $p<.01$) and analytic scale scores ($F=9.50$, $p<.01$). These findings indicate that the differences in scores between the staff development and control groups were caused by the training.

To analyze the effects of cooperative learning on the interaction of colleagues within this staff development program, ethnographic procedures were used. The data for the ethnographic component of this study were collected through participant observation, interviews with key informants and general interviews. The analysis of the ethnographic data highlighted the contrast between the personal interactions of administrators in the structured bureaucracy of that school district and the interactions within the cooperative learning environment of the staff development program. That is, the patterns of behavior often characterized by a struggle for power and influence were replaced by a willingness to collaborate as equals for mutual benefit.

As the ethnographic analysis developed, it focused on one event which the key informants emphasized as the single most significant outcome of the staff development program. This event was the formation of a cooperative learning group in which participants in the training session joined together on their own to continue learning and practicing the skills introduced in the training program.

During the staff development program, five participants discussed what they had accomplished and learned. As they talked, they agreed that they each had considerable expertise in supervision and that there was much they could learn from each

other as they worked together. They decided that they would continue to work together in a cooperative learning situation. They developed a plan to meet on a monthly basis during the next school year to help each other improve their skills in the supervision of instruction.

This collegial learning group has continued now through three school years. The administrators videotape themselves as they conduct post-observation conferences with teachers and then, as a group, they critique the post-observation conferences and the written supervisory reports which follow the conferences. It is significant that this group has followed the model established within the original staff development program. That is, they use simulations, role-playing, and collaborate in all activities. In other words, these administrators are using cooperative learning in order to enhance their own professional development; they are implementing what they experienced and what the program conductor modeled for them.

While a follow-up of this collegial learning group was not a purpose of the research study, it is noteworthy that the participating administrators report a year and a half later that they have also encouraged and modeled cooperation among their teachers. Not only did the administrators learn the skill of writing supervisory reports but they learned a process for conducting their own staff development. When group cooperation was modeled by the staff developer for the participants, the practice of cooperation expanded within the staff development group and then extended beyond the training group to include the entire school community.

Thus the participants learned simultaneously on three significant levels - they learned a skill for supervisory writing, a process for peer coaching, and a process for developing their staffs. Two implications for staff development follow from the experimental program. First, there is support for the assumption that educational leaders can improve their skills when they work together as colleagues. Second, there is a strong suggestion that staff developers must recognize the potent messages inherent in the methods they use. The nonverbal actions of a trainer convey important messages. If staff development leaders hope to instill the value of collegiality, then their staff development programs are more likely to succeed if they themselves serve as models of people who value and practice collegiality.

Staff development programs which model collegial learning require careful planning. If you want to implement collegiality through staff development, keep in mind the following six points: collaborative planning by you together with the participants can set the tone for cooperation in a staff development program; goals for collegiality as well as other learning outcomes need to

be established together in advance; both small and large group activities should be included and so structured that they will lead to interdependence among the participants; the setting and materials should be arranged in ways which will nonverbally encourage and facilitate cooperative interaction; while planning and conducting a collegial program, you must emphasize and reinforce the advantages of colleagues learning together; and, finally, it should not be a secret that our colleagues are our most valuable resources for professional growth.

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ENDNOTES

[1]The ethnographic analysis was based upon the theoretical framework as set forth by Bolman and Deal (1984).

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March 29, 1991